CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Ravalli Electric Coop – Eagles Roost Communications Site
Proposed
Implementation Date: Late Spring/Summer 2019
Proponent: Ravalli County Electric Cooperative
Location: Section 16, T6N - R21W.
County: Ravalli

I. TYPE AND PURPOSE OF ACTION

The granting of a 10-foot wide permanent easement for the installation and maintenance of a buried electric powerline approximately 4,749 feet long across state-owned trust lands within Section 16, T6N-R21W. The easement applicant is Ravalli Electric Cooperative. The power line is intended to provide electrical service to a communications tower owned by Ravalli County Electric Cooperative.

II. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED:

Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project. List number of individuals contacted, number of responses received, and newspapers in which notices were placed and for how long. Briefly summarize issues received from the public.

The public comment period for this project occurred from January 28, 2019 through February 11, 2019 and was accomplished by:

1. Mailing of a Scoping Notice to all (9) adjacent landowners.
2. Posting a Scoping Notice on the DNRC website.

Ravalli Electric contacted numerous neighbors seeking access for this powerline. Ravalli Electric also contacted and secured a statement from the irrigation ditch easement holder stating there were no damages anticipated from the proposed boring of the powerline under the ditch.

2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:

Examples: cost-share agreement with U.S. Forest Service, 124 Permit, 3A Authorization, Air Quality Major Open Burning Permit.

None. The proposed action would bore under Churn Creek avoiding any disturbance to the bed and banks. As such, a 310 permit will not be needed.

3. ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT:

Describe alternatives considered and, if applicable, provide brief description of how the alternatives were developed. List alternatives that were considered but eliminated from further analysis and why.

Ravalli Electric Cooperative (REC) has requested access to install cable and junction boxes to service a communications site located on private property. Multiple routes were considered for this project. Ultimately, the best (Action Alternative) route chosen follows an old logging road and crosses land owned by the State of Montana. The proposed route was chosen because it is shortest available route.

Two alternatives are considered for this project-

The No Action Alternative-the DNRC would not approve Ravalli Electric Coop's request for permanent easement.

The Action Alternative- the DNRC would grant Ravalli Electric Coop's request for a permanent easement with provisions which would protect the DNRC's property rights and mitigate any potential impacts to resources within the easement.

The proposed route crosses a state-owned trust land parcel for a total length of approximately 4,749 feet (see attached maps). The first approximately 1,949 feet would follow an existing logging road. The last approximately 2,800 feet would follow a ridgeline near the northern property boundary of state land.

Overall, REC is requesting a 10-foot wide easement to cross this parcel with an underground electric line. Two 2-inch diameter high density polyethylene (HDPE) conduit pipes would be buried. One conduit would contain a #2 aluminum conductor, and the other will remain empty for a potential future communication cable. The conduits would be placed by "plowing in" roughly 800-foot sections at a time with a pipe puller mounted on a D-7 bull dozer. The conduit would be placed approximately 36-inches below the existing ground surface. The crossing of Churn Creek and an irrigation ditch would be accomplished by boring underground. The project would also include installation of 6 green junction boxes placed approximately 800-feet apart on the State land.

III. IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE:

Consider the presence of fragile, compactable or unstable soils. Identify unusual geologic features. Specify any special reclamation considerations. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to soils.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged

If the Action Alternative is selected, the easement would be granted along the existing road and across state land. There would be limited, minor impacts to these resources.

Mitigations - stipulations would require the easement holder to; (1) grass seed areas disturbed by powerline installation as directed by DNRC to minimize erosion and potential seedbeds for noxious weed establishment; (2) wash equipment to remove potential noxious weed seed prior to entry into the area. (3) Operation of equipment would be permitted only under stable soil conditions (Soil moisture content at 4-inch depth less than 20% oven-dry weight).

5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION:

Identify important surface or groundwater resources. Consider the potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to water resources.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

If the Action Alternative is selected, the easement would be granted on existing roads. There would be limited, minor impacts to these resources.

Mitigations- - Stipulations would require the easement holder to; (1) grass seed areas disturbed by powerline installation as directed by DNRC to minimize erosion and potential seedbeds for noxious weed establishment and; (2) Crossing of Churn Creek and the irrigation ditch would require boring underground avoiding any disturbance to the stream and ditch bed and banks.

6. AIR QUALITY:

What pollutants or particulate would be produced (i.e. particulate matter from road use or harvesting, slash pile burning, prescribed burning, etc)? Identify the Airshed and Impact Zone (if any) according to the Montana/Idaho Airshed Group. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to air quality.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

If the Action Alternative is selected, the easement would be granted. It is not anticipated that any activities associated with the installation and use of the proposed buried power line easement on DNRC ownership would result in significant amounts of particulate matter.

7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY:

What changes would the action cause to vegetative communities? Consider rare plants or cover types that would be affected. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to vegetation.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

If the Action Alternative is selected, the easement would be granted. Minor impacts would be anticipated along the existing road and ridgeline.

Mitigations- - Stipulations would require the easement holder to; (1) grass seed areas disturbed by powerline installation as directed by DNRC to minimize erosion and potential seedbeds for noxious weed establishment and; (2) The removal of any trees would require approval by the DNRC.

8. TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:

Consider substantial habitat values and use of the area by wildlife, birds or fish. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to fish and wildlife.

All road access is through private property. A majority of the parcel was burned in 2000. The western half of the parcel was predominantly a stand replacement fire, whereas the eastern part of the parcel was a mixed severity fire. Current vegetation is a mixture of dry forest types dominated by open stands of Ponderosa pine, and open grasslands. Vegetation along Churn Creek is primarily composed of Douglas-fir and various brush species.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

If the Action Alternative be selected, minor impacts to vegetation would be anticipated. No impacts to the bed and banks of Churn Creek would be anticipated.

Mitigations- (1) Crossing of Churn Creek would require boring underground avoiding any disturbance to the bed and banks; (2) grass seed areas disturbed by powerline installation; (3) The removal of any trees would require approval by the DNRC.

9. UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:

Consider any federally listed threatened or endangered species or habitat identified in the project area. Determine effects to wetlands. Consider Sensitive Species or Species of special concern. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to these species and their habitat.

A search of the Montana Natural heritage website for threatened or endangered animal species within Township 6 North - Range 21 West was performed. Bull Trout and Grizzly bear were the animal species listed.
A search of the Montana Natural heritage website for threatened or endangered plant species within Township 6 North - Range 19 West was performed. No threatened or endangered plant species were found within this township. Five "plant species of concern" were identified within this township as follows: Whitebark pine, Sandweed, Scalepod, Fingered Shingle lichen, and Hooded Bush lichen.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Should the Action Alternative be selected, there would be no anticipated impacts to Bull Trout. The crossings of both Churn Creek and the irrigation ditch would be accomplished by underground boring away from the channels. No effects to bed and banks would be anticipated. Impacts to Grizzly bear habitat would be minor. Since no threatened or endangered plant species were identified as existing within this township and disturbance is limited, no impacts threatened or endangered or to plant species of concern would be anticipated.

Mitigations- (1) Crossing of Churn Creek would require boring underground avoiding any disturbance to the bed and banks; (2) grass seed areas disturbed by powerline installation; (3) The removal of any trees would require approval by the DNRC.

10. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:

Identify and determine direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to historical, archaeological or paleontological resources.

A Class I (literature review level) review was conducted by the DNRC staff archaeologist for the area of potential effect (APE). This entailed inspection of project maps, DNRC's sites/site leads database, land use records, General Land Office Survey Plats, and control cards. The Class I search revealed that no cultural or paleontological resources have been identified in the APE. However, if previously unknown cultural or paleontological materials are identified during project related activities, all work will cease until a professional assessment of such resources can be made.

11. AESTHETICS:

Determine if the project is located on a prominent topographic feature or may be visible from populated or scenic areas. What level of noise, light or visual change would be produced? Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to aesthetics.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative minor soil disturbance would occur associated with burying the electric power line. The visual impacts of soil disturbance impacts would be minor. The primary visual impact of the proposal would be the installation of 6 green junction boxes and line location posts at selected locations. The junction boxes would be spaced approximately 800 feet apart. Location posts would be near crossings of the irrigation ditch and Churn creek.

Mitigation- (1) Grass seed areas disturbed by powerline installation; (2) The removal of any trees would require approval by the DNRC.

12. DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY:
Determine the amount of limited resources the project would require. Identify other activities nearby that the project would affect. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to environmental resources.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative, electric power would be provided to a communications site. Minor impacts would occur to the affected properties as the power line would be underground.

13. OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA:
List other studies, plans or projects on this tract. Determine cumulative impacts likely to occur as a result of current private, state or federal actions in the analysis area, and from future proposed state actions in the analysis area that are under MEPA review (scoped) or permitting review by any state agency.

N/A

IV. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

- *RESOURCES potentially impacted are listed on the form, followed by common issues that would be considered.*
- *Explain POTENTIAL IMPACTS AND MITIGATIONS following each resource heading.*
- *Enter "NONE" If no impacts are identified or the resource is not present.*

14. HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY:
Identify any health and safety risks posed by the project.

Under the No Action Alternative, the would be no change to human health and safety.

Selection of the Action Alternative would not be expected to cause any substantial change to human health and safety risks within the project area. Selected locations of the line would be posted to provide warning of a potential underground hazard.

15. INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURE ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION:
Identify how the project would add to or alter these activities.

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no change in industrial, commercial, and agricultural activities and production.

Under the Action Alternative, because all the power line route is underground, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged. There is a concern that the junction boxes not be placed in locations that would narrow the width of roadways and impair their use for commercial logging. There is also a concern that junction boxes not be placed in locations that would impair existing road drainage.

Mitigations: - Junction boxes should not be placed in locations that would narrow the width roadways and impair their use for commercial logging. Junction boxes should not be placed in locations that would impair the effectiveness of existing road drainage features

16. QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT:
Estimate the number of jobs the project would create, move or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to the employment market.

Under the No Action Alternative, the quantity and distribution of employment would remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative, there would be a minor direct short-term increase in employment associated with the installation of the underground electric distribution line.

17. LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES:
Estimate tax revenue the project would create or eliminate. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to taxes and revenue.

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no change to the local and state tax base and tax revenues.

Under the Action Alternative, very little change to the local and state tax base and tax revenues is anticipated.

18. DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES:
Estimate increases in traffic and changes to traffic patterns. What changes would be needed to fire protection, police, schools, etc.? Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of this and other projects on government services

Under the No Action Alternative, the demand for government services would remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative, the demand for government services would not be expected to change.

19. LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS:
List State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, and other zoning or management plans, and identify how they would affect this project.

N/A

20. ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES:
Identify any wilderness or recreational areas nearby or access routes through this tract. Determine the effects of the project on recreational potential within the tract. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to recreational and wilderness activities.

This parcel of state trust land receives limited recreational use. Road access to the parcel is through private lands. Public use is limited to walk-in access through adjacent public lands or through permission of adjacent private landowners.

Under the No Action Alternative, recreational activities would remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative, recreational activities would remain unchanged. The buried cables and junction boxes will not affect access to the parcel.

21. DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING:
Estimate population changes and additional housing the project would require. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to population and housing.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

22. SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES:
Identify potential disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities.

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

23. CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY:
How would the action affect any unique quality of the area?

Under the No Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

Under the Action Alternative, the condition of these resources would remain unchanged.

24. OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CIRCUMSTANCES:
Estimate the return to the trust. Include appropriate economic analysis. Identify potential future uses for the analysis area other than existing management. Identify direct, indirect, and cumulative economic and social effects likely to occur as a result of the proposed action.

Under the No Action Alternative, there would be no change in returns to the Common Schools Trust.

Using an estimated land value of $1,000/acre and an area of 1.09 acres for the proposed easement, selection of the Action Alternative would return approximately $1,090 to the Common Schools Trust.

EA Checklist Prepared By:	**Name: Thayer Jacques**	**Date: February 14, 2018**
	Title: Hamilton Unit Forester – SWLO	

V. FINDING

25. ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:

I select the Action Alternative with the mitigations noted above. This alternative provides power desired by REC for a communications site while providing compensation (revenue) to the common school trust and contains mitigations to address concerns noted in the Environmental Assessment.

26. SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL IMPACTS:

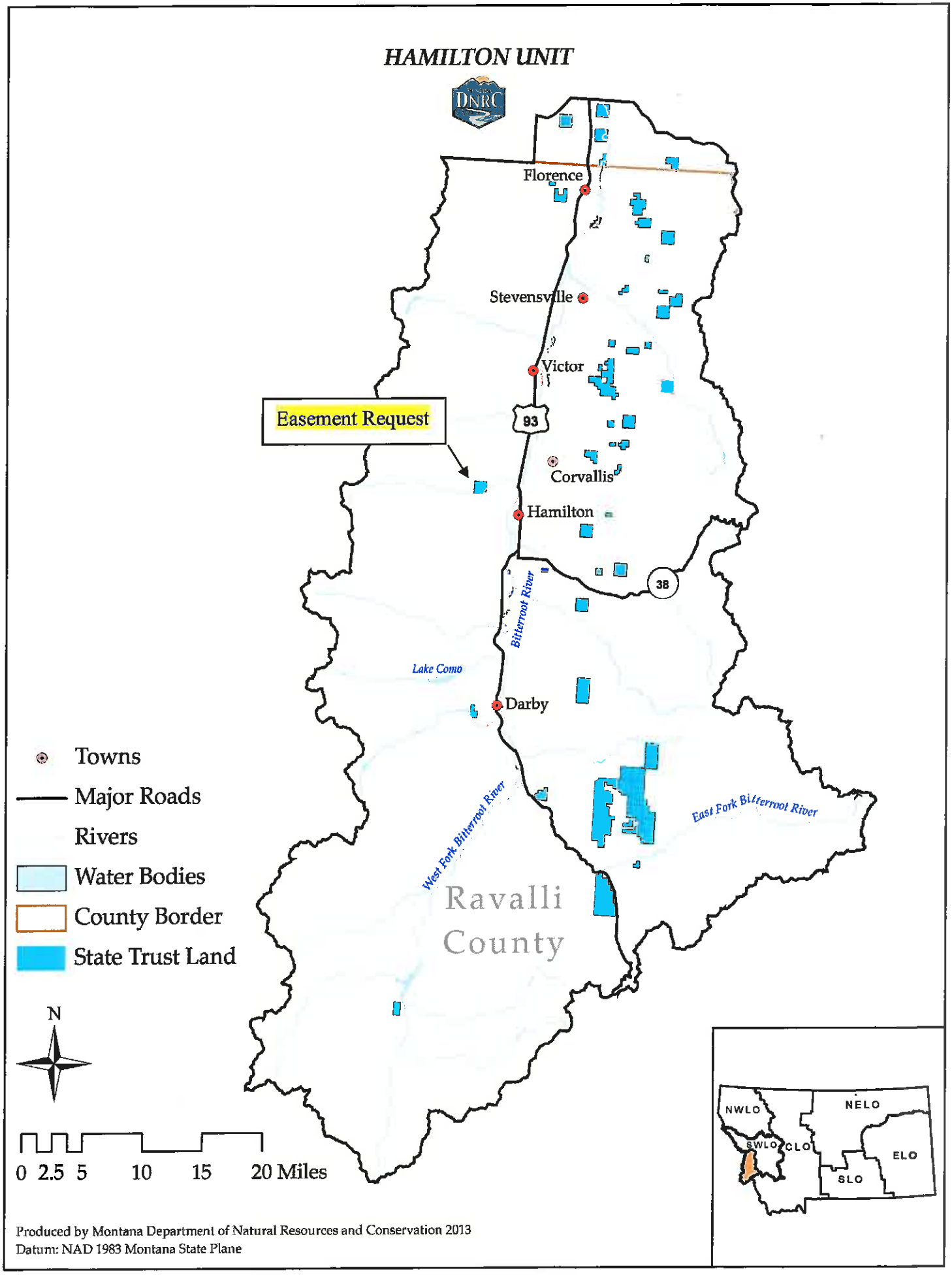
I find the impacts associated with implementation are not significant.

27. NEED FOR FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

[ ] EIS [ ] More Detailed EA [X] No Further Analysis

EA Checklist Approved By:	**Name:**	Robert H. Storer
	Title:	SWLO Trust Lands Program Manager
Signature: Robert H Storer	**Date:** February 15, 2019	

HAMILTON UNIT



Produced by Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation 2013
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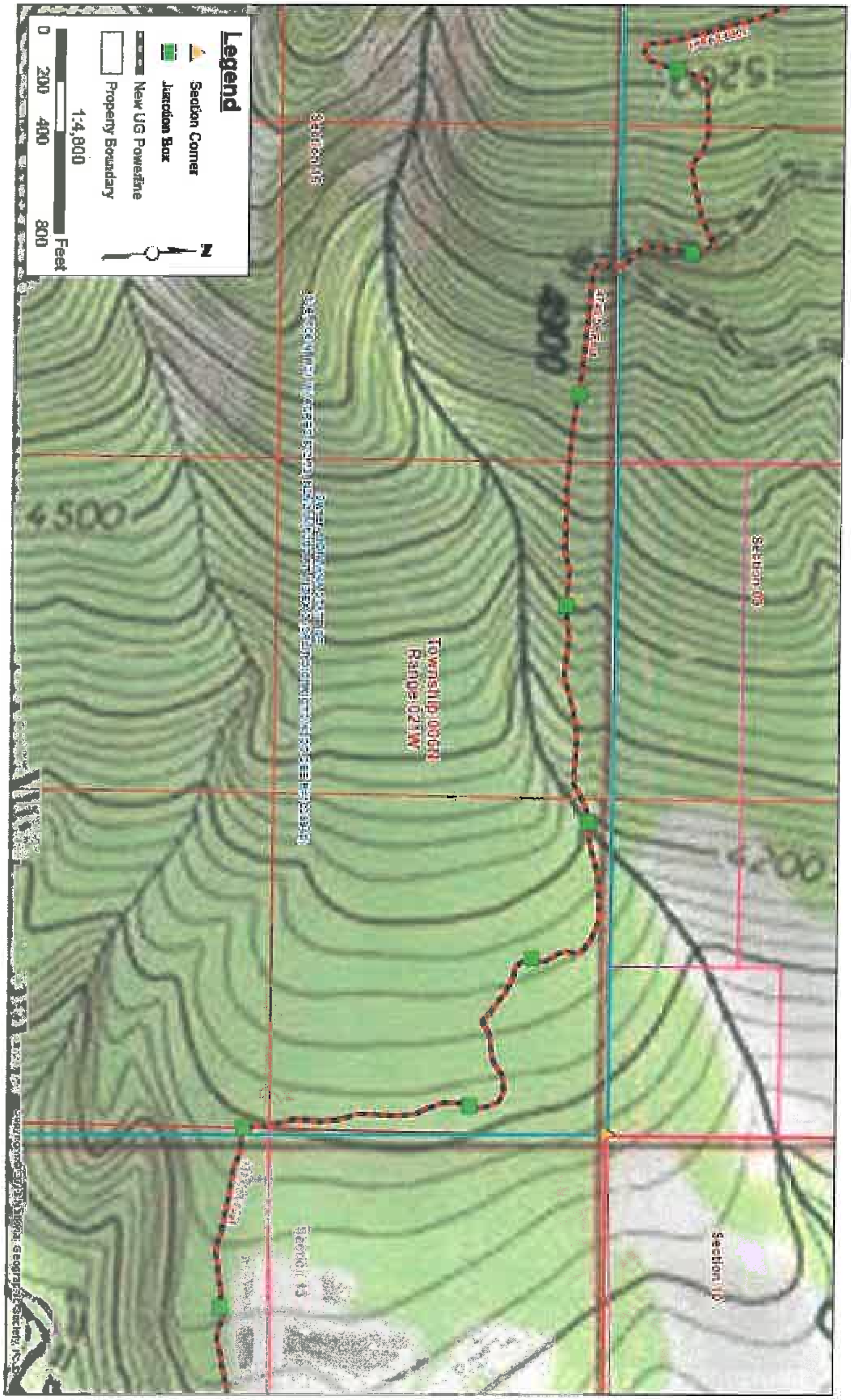
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Property Boundary
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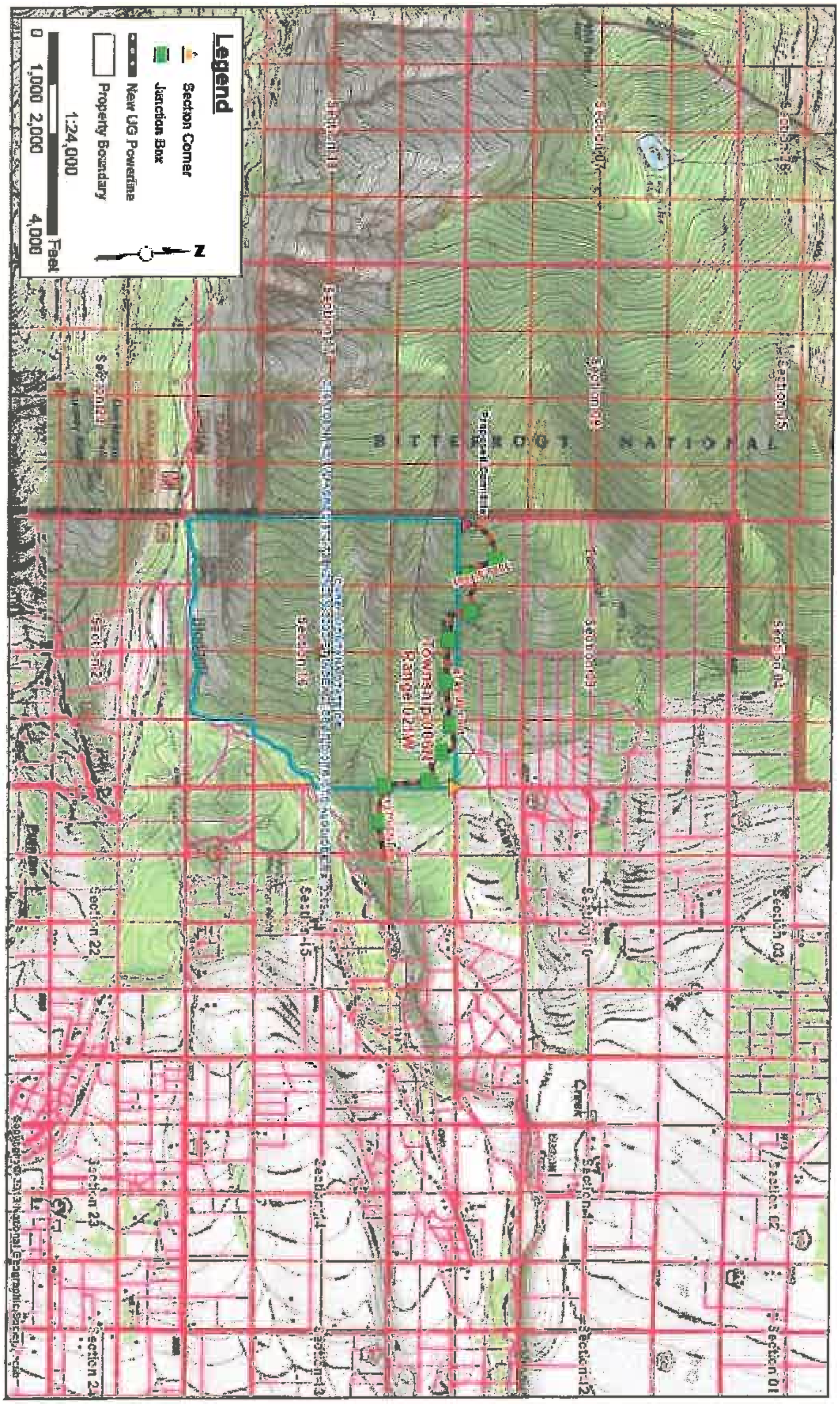
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Section 03
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Section 02
Section 11
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Section 14